

December 17, 2019

Dear Coroners and Law Enforcement Agents,

Thank you for your patience as we continue to work hard to hire a new forensic pathologist; below is an update on our search.

Efforts to hire a new State Forensic Examiner began last February when Dr. Massello notified us of his impending retirement. After an exhaustive search through typical means, we entered into a contractual agreement on November 1, 2019 with a search agency to assist with finding viable candidates that could serve as our next State Forensic Examiner. We have been in conversation with three different candidates since then.

We're grateful to Dr. Massello for continuing to partner with us by working limited hours in his retirement. Priority is being given to SIDS cases, homicides, and charred remains. Other cases may be accepted for autopsy, depending on circumstances and the county coroner's findings. In this interim period, it will be the county coroner that will be conducting most of the post-mortem work, which will largely consist of an external examination and specimen collection for toxicology. For coroner cases that do not undergo a forensic autopsy, our office will provide guidance as needed or requested.

We have a contract with the University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences, Department of Pathology (UND), to provide pathology support in North Dakota. The first part of this contract specifies that UND will provide routine forensic pathology services for the 21 eastern counties in the state. These counties include: Rolette, Towner, Cavalier, Pembina, Walsh, Ramsey, Benson, Pierce, Wells, Eddy, Foster, Nelson, Grand Forks, Traill, Steele, Griggs, Barnes, Cass, Richland, Ransom and Sargent counties. The second part of the contract allows our office to refer up to two cases per week from the western 32 counties to UND during weeks when Dr. Massello is out of town.

In situations where Dr. Massello will not be available for more than a week and UND is not an option, the Forensic Examiner's Office will work with you to find a solution for the needed autopsy, which may include performing the autopsy upon Dr. Massello's return to the office.

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In the event where there is a mutual agreement that an autopsy is necessary and the body needs to be stored while awaiting arrangements for an autopsy, the State Forensic Examiner's office will make its cooler available, provided there is space.

We understand that the current vacancy and reduced resources to provide forensic pathology services is frustrating for local officials seeking these services; we are frustrated as well. Our goal continues to be filling the vacancy as soon as possible. Thank you for your patience as we work to find a forensic pathologist in a market that's extremely competitive.

The Forensic Examiner's Office is available for consultation on cases and we encourage you to call if you have questions, concerns, or would like guidance and recommendations. Our telephone number is 701-328-6138.

Sincerely,



Kirby Kruger
Chief, Medical Services Section